

## **Ben Chida**

### **Chief Deputy Cabinet Secretary, Office of the Governor**



Ben Chida is Chief Deputy Cabinet Secretary and Senior Advisor for Cradle to Career in the Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, which he joined after serving on the Governor's transition in 2018. Prior to joining the Governor's Office, Ben served as Attorney-Advisor in the executive office of then-Attorney General Kamala D. Harris, as a judicial law clerk to federal judges in California and on the D.C. Circuit, and as a third-grade teacher in New York City. Ben's educational journey includes dropping out of high school, attending Orange Coast College, and receiving a B.A. from UC Berkeley, a teaching certificate in childhood education from Pace University, and a J.D. from Harvard Law School.

**Sonya Christian, PhD**  
**Chancellor, California Community Colleges**



Dr. Sonya Christian recently served as the sixth [Chancellor of the Kern Community College District \(Kern district\)](#). A position she's held since July 2021. Christian began her three-decade career locally within Kern district as a mathematics faculty, a Division Chair, and Dean of Science, Engineering, Allied Health and Math at Bakersfield College. From 2013 to 2021 she served as the 10th [President of Bakersfield College](#) – one of the colleges overseen by Kern district.

Throughout her career Dr. Christian has been committed to advancing work through distributed leadership and collaborative communities of learning, and to promoting the value of equity in student learning, access, success and economic mobility. She says: *The only way to scale work is to tap into the talent, ingenuity, dedication, and care of the people that provide the power to transform. The alignment of distributed forces stems from shared ownership that is almost always more fundamental than the details of the solution, not least because it builds a sense of community that creates long-term sustainability.*

Her dedication to student success with equity led her to statewide and national leadership roles where she advocated for [the cost benefits of adopting a Guided Pathways model](#). Christian spearheaded the statewide coalition in 2015 that led to securing philanthropic funding for the 20-college Guided Pathways demonstration project in California, leading to a \$150M state investment in Guided Pathways and ultimately to the Vision for Success metrics adopted by the Board of Governors in 2017. Christian advanced the framework of Guided Pathways through [the newsletter Trailblazers from 2016 to 2020](#), creating a fundamental base of information for scaling the work statewide. Her work in student success with equity also extends to her leadership in developing and implementing the Early College Program.

Under her leadership, [Bakersfield College became one of the first community colleges in California to offer a baccalaureate degree](#) as part of a pilot program announced in 2015. She believes that the [community college baccalaureate degree program](#) is a vital tool for growing economic and social mobility of disinvested communities, and continues to fiercely advocate for ways to [create more 4-Year Community College degrees in California](#) and across the nation.

Dr. Christian's repeated call to *Dare Mighty Things* – inspired by NASA's Perseverance Mars lander – reflects a sense of urgency in her work on [energy and climate resilience](#) and emerging energies like [carbon capture](#). Under her leadership, Kern district established [the California Renewable Energy Laboratory](#), an innovative coalition of public and private partners seeking to create a secure and stable energy future.

She is a fierce advocate for the life-changing ability of community colleges to reach underserved populations and educate [the future workforce](#). Her vision that community colleges can transform rural communities and her involvement with [the Kern Coalition](#) is increasing collaborations between educational institutions and the communities they serve.

Dr. Christian is a firm believer in using data and civil dialogue to guide public policy and resource allocation and in [leveraging opportunities that prepare students for careers in emerging technologies](#), particularly in the energy and climate industries where [community colleges have become the perfect partner in creating green jobs](#). She believes that facts and results should drive decision making, ensuring that initiatives will lead to sustainable systemic change.

She is a strong voice for [women's equality in education](#) and currently serves as chair of the California Community College Women's Caucus. She is also Vice Chair of the Campaign for College Opportunity Board of Directors and is a

member of the California Community Colleges Asian American Pacific Islander Trustees and Administrators caucus.

Governor Gavin Newsom recognized her statewide leadership when he appointed her to the Student Centered Funding Formula Oversight Committee, where she served from 2019-2022. Her dedication to institutional quality is evidenced in her work with the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, where she served as chair for two years starting in 2020, having previously served for the commission as Vice-Chair from 2018-2020.